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JOHN KNOX AS A MAN OF THE WORLD

“WHILE to their life-work Norsemen set out,
Will-lessly wavering, daunted with doubt,
While hearts are shrunken, minds helplessly shivering,
Weak as a willow-wand, wind-swept and quivering,
While about one thing alone they’re united,
Namely that greatness be stoned and despited,—
While they seek honour in fleeting and falling,
Then Bishop Nicholas toils in his calling.”

Such an one, toiling, encouraging and energizing, was John Knox; he takes his place as one of those pestilent fellows who disturb their comfort-loving fellow-men with their “Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion!” He stands alongside of masterless and masterful leaders like Hildebrand, or Oliver Cromwell, or John Brown—elemental forces, unpredictable, unaccountable and beyond analysis. John Knox not only lived and was a part of his country’s ecclesiastical history, he was also a man who had great purposes in his mind; and that world which he despised, contemned, brow-beat and over-awed, after all held him, enveloped him and conditioned him. Is it not possible to separate out what distinguishes him as a man among men, to see what were his methods of appealing to his kind, and how he looked upon society and the state? For such a purpose we should in succession notice Knox’s personality; his literary methods and achievements: his work as a destructive statesman, overturning an older order of things; and his place as a constructive statesman, establishing a new dispensation. For such a survey the obvious materials are John Knox’s own works, and from those six bulky volumes is drawn most of what is here written on John Knox as a Man of the World.

I.

Among the many curious things in the life of John Knox not the least is that out of his sixty-seven years, nearly forty-two are buried in as much obscurity as the personal life of his contemporary, William Shakespeare. Of those years we know only three facts: he sprang from a humble family, an origin which stood

much in his way when he became associated with arrogant nobles; he was a student at a university and there he learned the art of controversy; he was in priest's orders and thus always understood the assailable side of the clergy. It seems that he made absolutely no impression on the world until he began his reform work in 1547.

Yet this obscure priest, hardly known except to the fathers of the boys whom he had tutored, became a genuine cosmopolite: a galley-slave in France; royal preacher in England; minister in Frankfort, in Geneva and in Dieppe; charged with treason to the emperor; hated by Queen Elizabeth; yet the associate of the national leaders in Scotland, the friend of the greatest living reformers and a genuine international force. All these influences helped to mould him, yet all of them left him essentially a Scotchman, rude, vigorous, tenacious, unsympathetic and powerful. His relations with courts made him the sturdier champion of the people; his knowledge of tongues and literatures lent sharpness to his words; he was a man of the whole world, yet none the less a citizen of his own country.

Early in his life Knox attracted the attention and the respect of some powerful men: from the great Major he learned his scholastic reasoning; Wishart, the reformer, he loved and for him he would have died; Balnaves was his close friend; both Somerset and Northumberland, successively patrons of the king of England, liked and advanced him; he took the advice of Bullinger, or rather asked it and then followed his own mind; he was the personal friend of Calvin. Nevertheless it must be owned that he never won the enduring personal affection of any other Scottish reformer or potentate. There was no Melancthon for his Luthership, and in his last days his servant Bannatyne seems to have been the only familiar of his house.

Yet after all Knox did have one class of warmly attached and faithful friends: throughout his life women were attracted by him and sought his friendship; Mrs. Bowes of Berwick, whose daughter he married, Mrs. Locke and Mrs. Hickman, "*Merchendis wyffis in Londoun*", hung upon his words as the breath of life. Mrs. Elizabeth Barron, he says, "*Be reasson that she had a trubled conscience, delyted much in the company of the said Johne, becaus that he, according to the grace gevin unto him, opened more fullie the fontane of Goddis mercyes, then did the commoun sorte of teachearis that she had hard befor.*"

To Mrs. Bowes, his wife's mother, and Mrs. Locke he wrote

many letters, chiefly devoted to general spiritual counsel, with a sprinkling of news and no personal color. To the one queen of his personal acquaintance, he was conspicuously ungallant; and, on one occasion when he was waiting her pleasure in the anteroom, he took the opportunity to draw the ladies in waiting together and to fix their attention upon "that knave Death, that will come whithther we will or not! And when he has laid on his areist, the foull wormes wilbe busye with this flesche, be it never so fayr and so tender." He married twice, both times with young women, but in all his extant writings and letters there is scarce an allusion to either of these spouses, except a reference shortly after his first marriage to "daylie trubles occuring as weill in my domesticall charge, whair-with befor I haif not bene accustomit". As for his children his only reference to them seems to be in an interview with Queen Mary when he said "I can skarslie weill abyde the tearis of my awin boyes whome my awin hand correctis."

Knox had an unusual facility of alienating his friends. Full of professional pride in his prophetic office, he loved to warn great men of their delinquencies; doubtless he would have thought himself lacking in Christian duty if, when writing to Cecil whom he highly respected and whose good will he was anxious to have, he had omitted to say to him, "For to the suppressing of Christis trew Evangell, to the erecting of idolatrie, and to the shedding of the blood of Goddis most deare childrein have you, by silence, consented and subscriyvit." Cecil apparently accepted this as the small change of correspondence, but not so all of Knox's friends and adherents. The mighty Earl of Arran disliked it when Knox compared him unfavorably with Jehosaphat who "Keipit not himself (said he) inclosed in his chalmer, but frequented the multitude". After the marriage of Lord James Stewart, earl of Mar, the preacher said to him in public, "Unto this day the Kirk of God hath receaved comfort by you, and by your laubouris; in the which, yf heirafter ye shalbe found faynter then that ye war befor, it wilbe said that your Wyeff hath changed your nature." No wonder that relations between the two were so strained that "The said Johne by his letter, gave a discharge to the said Erle of all further intro-missioun or cayr with his effaires." Indeed the great reformer came to the point where he spared nobody, and did not hesitate to explain a crisis in the Reformation, "because that suddandlie the most parte of us declyned from the puritie of Goddis word, and began to follow the world; and so agane to schaik handis with the Devil, and with idolatrie".

If Knox hammered his friends he flayed his enemies, of whom he had a numerous and choice assortment. With them his process was simple; none of your gradations for him, none of your hair-splitting distinctions between Beelzebub and the Bishop of St. Andrews. For instance, he so hated the powerful Hamilton family, which did not permit a plebeian to outdo it in hearty curses, that Archibald Hamilton actually refused to go to church and hear his family called murderers. To Knox, James V. was "that blynded and most vitious man, the Prince". Of Mary Tudor he said, "For after him was rased up, in Goddis hote displeasure, that idolatress Jesabel, mischevous Marie, of the Spanyardis blodde; a cruel persectrix of Goddis people, as the actes of hir unhappy regne can sufficiently witenesse." Mary, Queen of Scots, he came to hate with the ferocity which most men would save for a Lucretia Borgia; and after her marriage with Darnley, he publicly said, "And how did Ahab visite God againe for his great benefit received? Did he remove his idolatrie? did he correct his idolatrous wife Jezabel? . . . But what was the ende hereof? The last visitation of God was, that dogges licked the blood of the one, and did eate the flesh of the other."

Besides these personal and pet abhorrences, he had a comprehensive ill opinion of all Catholics. "In the name of the Lorde Jesus", he wrote in 1559, "I require of you, that no dumme dogg, no poisoned and pestilent Papist, none who before hath persecuted God's children, or obstinately maintained idolatrie, be placed above the people of God, to infect and poison." And for those who persisted in going to mass he made the cruel decree, "Yea, that the same man or men, that go aboute to destroy God's true religion once established, and to erect idolatrie, which God detesteth, be adjudged to death, according to God's commandment."

Toward the end of his life, these seeds of hatred bore an abundant fruit, and several efforts were made to silence him. He was once driven out of Edinburgh. Kirkaldy of Grange, enraged because Knox, "in his sermon openlie called me a murtherer and a throat cutter", appealed to the Assembly and getting no satisfaction, rumor had it that he "hes sworne him enemie to John Knox, and will slay him". This led to a rallying of Knox's friends who served notice on Kirkaldy of Grange that "the death and lyfe of that our said brother is to us so pretious and deir, as is our owin lyves and deathis". Knox was once summoned before the Council and once before the Church. In his very last hours, Knox gave an extraordinary example of his abilities of resentment. Maitland of

Lethington, secretary to the Session, and once as nearly a friend as Knox ever made in Scotland, protested because Knox from the pulpit called him an atheist; whereupon the grizzled old lion sent him word, "that Johne Knox remainis the same man, now going to die, that ever he has hard him defoir, quhen he was able of body, and that gif he repentit not, the threateningis be him pronounced sould fall upoun him and that house!"

II.

"King Harry loved a man", and the world loves a fighter. Whatever the unlovable side of John Knox, when the battle of the Scotch Reformation surged, there he was dealing terrific blows with the two weapons in which he had unrivalled skill among his compeers, his pen and his tongue. Measured by the standards of any time he was a strong writer and a stronger speaker. The only time when he ever seems to have distrusted his powers was when he asked the consent of her unwilling relatives to a marriage with Marjorie Bowes. He said of this episode: "God knawis, I did use no rethorick nor collourit speach; but wald haif spokin the treuth, and that in maist simpill maner. I am not a gud oratour in my own caus." To judge from his controversial writings, he knew an infinitude of ancient and patristic writers and statesmen, whose names he rolls under his tongue like a sweet morsel. Joseph, Pharas, Abselom, Moyses, Salamaneser, Nebucadnelzar, Darius, Cyrus, he drives together in the same pamphlet like a flock of sheep. Prophets, priests and kings are marshalled to defend his position, and he is not sparing of his allusions to Kora and Ahab and the rest of the disobedient whose fate pointed such a moral for his countrymen. The Old Testament certainly furnishes a most satisfactory set of unfavorable prognostications for a skilful expounder of a nation's faults. Of the God of the old dispensation, Knox had a conception worthy of Jonathan Edwards—"Ye ought, I say, to be most assuredly persuaded, that the lamentable voices of all these have so beaten the ears of our God, and that the tears, which in anguishe they powred forthe, have so replenished and fylde the bottel which hangeth continually in the eies of the Almightye, that he hath sworne by his owne holynes, that he wil arise in his hote fury, that he will revenge their cause (and that speedely)."

Of languages he knew several, Latin of course, for that was the vernacular of the universities; German very likely, for he lived in Frankfort; French undoubtedly for he spent years in France and Geneva; Greek and Hebrew he attacked after he became a Protes-

tant. With few exceptions, however, all his writings are in English and although its quaint spelling makes it seem uncanny, it had as good a right to be considered standard English in his time as the court dialect of Westminster. Knox's style is one of his just claims to greatness, pungent, direct, and free from those meanders and double hard knots which make the writings of Sir John Eliot or Cotton Mather such a tax upon the reader.

Will you sample Knox's cruet, in which you will find vinegar, pepper, biting mustard and clear vitriol? Take for instance his defiance of Rome: "We are not sent by that Romane Antichriste, whome he calleth Pope, nor yet from his carnal Cardinales, nor dum-horned Bischoppes." Or this letter to Mrs. Locke on the anguish of the Reformation struggle, "For one day of trubles, since my last arrivall in Scotland, hath more pierced my heart than all the torments of the galeyes did the space of 19 moneths; for that torment, for the most part, did tuiche the bodie, but this pearces the soule and inward affectiouns." Or this fine assertion of the power of mind over circumstances, "For this bodie lying in maist panefull handis, amangis the middis of cruell tyrantis, his mercie and gudnes provydit that the hand suld wryt, and beir witness to the confessionioun of the heart more abundantlie than ever yet the tounge spoke."

Knox's literary gifts showed themselves in a considerable variety of publications. Leaving out of account for the moment the *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* and the *History of the Reformation*, his most important writings include a series of addresses, letters and appeals, which are to the Scotch Reformation what Luther's *Letter to the Christian German Nobility* was, a successful effort to arouse the nation to a sense of the real nature of the conflict with Rome. Such were his *Letters to the Queen Regent in 1555*, his *Appelation to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland in 1558*, his *Godlie Letter to the Faithful in London*, his *Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England* and his manifestoes *To the French Soldiers* and *To the Scottish Clergy*. This, however, was only a part of his literary activity, for in the first stages of the Reformation, as secretary to the Congregation, he drafted many of their papers, even including the Treaty of Berwick with England in 1560; and he had an important part in the *Confession of Faith* and the *Book of Discipline*, which were an official summary of the results of the Revolution. Nothing but an actual reading of these papers can convey an adequate impression of their vigor, the directness of their address to the

questions which they discuss; and the William Lloyd Garrison-like disregard of any point of view but that of the instant reformer.

Far and away the most renowned of Knox's writings is his *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, which was printed in 1558. It is a powerful, reckless and unscrupulous attack upon the title of Mary Tudor, with absolute disregard of the easily predictable effects upon himself and mankind. The succession of Elizabeth to the throne a few months later put the champion of Protestantism into the highly unpleasant position of attacking the title of the leading Protestant sovereign of Europe. Here was the opportunity to admit an error; but in a letter to Elizabeth intended to placate her, the most courteous phrase that he could think of was, "But if, these premisses (as God forbid) neglected, yee shall begin to brag of your birth, and to build your authoritie upone your owne law, flatter who so list, your felicitie shalbe short. Interprete my rude words in the best part, as written by him who is no enemy to your Grace." He would not even take advantage of the admission in his *First Blast* that there might be exceptions, and to the day of Knox's death, Elizabeth disliked him and would have none of his intervention that she could help; and instead of being the bond of connection between the Court of England and the Reformers in Scotland, it soon became evident that he stood in the way. Yet ten years later he still stoutly maintained, "Because I have the testimonie of a good conscience, that in writing that Treatise, against which so manie worldlie men have stormed, and yitt storme, I nather sought myself nor worldlie promotion; and because, as yet, I have neither heard nor seene law nor Scripture to overthrow my grounds."

Vastly more important to literature and to the history of the times is Knox's *History of the Reformation of the Religioun within the Realme of Scotland*. The purpose of this work is set forth in the preface, "It was concluded, that faythfull rehersall should be maid of such persnages as God had maide instrumentis of his glorie, by oppenyng of thame selfis to manifest abuses, superstitioun, and idolatrie; and, albeit thare be no great nomber, yet ar thei mo then the Collectour wold have looked for at the begynnyng." Among the personages of the book whom God made instruments of his glory, the writer leaves no doubt as to who was the chief; for the *History of the Reformation* is essentially an autobiographical fragment. Dr. Johnson said of his version of the debates of Parliament that "He took care that the Whig dogs did not have the best of it"; and John Knox had an unrivalled op-

portunity to make clear the significance of John Knox in the Scotch Reformation.

Numerous documents and statements are introduced into Knox's text, and his undoubtedly highly trained memory for the exact words of an author or of a conversation enables him to put on record most precious evidences as to the inner workings of the Reformation, though often there is no sufficient material for checking up either the memory of the writer or his evident propensity to believe anything that was to the discredit of his enemies. Yet it is a striking fact that if the manuscript of the *History* had perished before it was committed to print Knox would, outside of his theological work, be little better known to posterity than the Dr. Prynne who preached against Queen Henrietta Maria and lost his ears in consequence. For Knox's genius lay in his public utterances, of which almost none are preserved outside of his own writings. Furthermore, at the very beginning Knox laid down the principle: "With the Pollicey, mynd we to meddill no further than it hath Religioun mixed with it." And the *History* lays curiously little weight on details of governmental organization and public opinion, which seemed to Knox subordinate.

Beside his formal works Knox employed throughout his public life the method of writing letters, and he had a strong and effective epistolary style. Many of these letters were, quite in the modern method, sent to the press almost before they had reached the person to whom they were directed. An excellent example is the letter to the Queen Regent in 1555, which she not inaptly called a "pasquil", and which Knox subsequently republished with additions and elaborate scriptural side-references. He begins with a benediction, writes with more geniality than was common to him, but soon comes to his infallible conclusion: "Oneles in your regiment and using of power, your Grace be founde different from the multitude of Princes and head rulers, that this pre-eminence wherein ye ar placed shall be your dejection to torment and payn everlasting."

In another literary field also, Knox showed distinct aptitude and success; this was in the disputations which were so common in Reformation times and which gave such excellent opportunity for a strong and ready mind like Knox's, who loved controversy and excelled in dialectics. The arguments in several of these disputations have been preserved for us by Knox, especially that of 1547, early in the struggle, with the superior of St. Andrews; in 1561 with Anderson and Leslie; and in 1562, the most elaborate and important of all, with Quintin Kennedy, abbot of Crossraguel. Of

course in all these jousts, the true knight unhorses his adversary; for what purpose else did John Knox live in the world but to beat down his opponents? "I shall prove plainlye", said one of his opponents, "that Ceremonies are ordeyned by God." To which Knox instantly replied, "Such as God hes ordeyned we allow, and with reverence we use thame. But the questions is of those that God hes not ordeyned, such as in Baptisme, candill, oyle, and the rest of the Papisticall inventionis."

His debate with Kennedy is delightfully rugged. The reasonings of both sides seem to the layman to be distinctly scholastic, Knox appealing not so much to principles as to proof-texts. At last his opponent summoned as a witness Melchisedec and when Knox showed that the passage to which he referred did not bear him out, Quintin's only answer was, "Preve that." This somewhat technical victory of Knox, in accordance with the laws of the game, seems to have made a great impression upon the auditors.

Truly, every day of Knox's later life was a day of disputation, for he needed no abbot nor fellow-Protestant to stand up and argue against; in every sermon and every address he was slaying dragons by attacking the arguments of those opposed to him. It was as a sermonizer that Knox accomplished most of his results; and notwithstanding his theological works, which undoubtedly are the part of his activity which most affected the world at large, in Scotland his status was that of the bold and terrifying preacher. He began his public life in a sermon to the castellans of St. Andrews, and contemporary testimony tells us of the effect of his preaching. "In the opening upe of his text he was moderat the space of an halff houre; bot when he enterit to application he maid me sa to grew and tremble, that I could nocht hald a pen to wryt." And when Knox was an old man a hearer wrote, "Or he haid done with his sermon he was sa active and vigorus, that he was lyk to ding that pulpit in blads and flie out of it."

Knox preached several times a week for twenty-three years; first, regularly at the castle of St. Andrews; then, in Berwick and in England, as a royal chaplain of Edward VI.; then, at Frankfort and Geneva; then, at the tolbooth in Edinburgh in 1559: from his designation in 1560 as one of the two ministers of St. Giles Church, Edinburgh, he remained to the end of his life in that pulpit.

Yet out of his thousands of sermons only three or four have been preserved in full; among them the famous discourse preached in St. Giles Church, August 19, 1565, "For the which the said John Knoxe was inhibite preaching for a season". And no wonder,

for upon the text, "O Lorde, our God, other lords beside ye have ruled us", he scored and assailed Darnley, titular king of Scotland, then and there present. He takes as his subject nine successive verses from the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah. The mixture of Bible history, general admonition and application to the conditions of Scotland is lively and effective, and he manages to bring in Moses, Aaron, Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, David, Abraham, Jeroboam, Ezekiel, Solomon, the Babylonians, Turks and Saracens, Daniel, "Sydrack, Misacke and Abednego", Darius, Satan, Zacharias, Ahab, Jezebel, Adam, Paul, Althasius, Julian, as coadjutors and witnesses. No wonder that after such a bombardment Darnley "was so moved at this sermon, that he would not dine; and being troubled with great furie, he passed in the afternoon to the hawking".

It was of course the regular duty of every Puritan parson to lecture the potentate who sat below him. Tradition has it that Oliver Cromwell once was obliged to listen to a long discourse dealing plainly with his shortcomings, and that the only indication that he was pricked was an invitation to the minister to dine with him, at which solemn function another minister was asked to say grace; the grace was three hours long; the Protector had already had his dinner. Even Knox was obliged to observe that Huntley was accustomed to "Pyck his naillis and pull down his bonet ower his eyis, when idolatrie, witchcraft, murther, oppressioun and such vices war rebuked. Was not his common talk, When thei knaiffis have railled thair fill, then will thei hald thair peace?"

Knox's pulpit was to him his professor's chair, his bishop's throne, his advocate's brief, his journalist's editorial page and his judge's decision. There must have been a tremendous personal force which went with the clear-cut and intense sentences which he hurled at his enemies; for the written words do not account for his political influence. What was that force?

In the first place Knox made his sermons a means of instruction; he says of his first sermon at St. Andrews, "The people hearing the offer, cryed with one consent, 'We can not all read your writtingis, butt we may all hear your preaching; Tharfore we requyre you, in the name of God, that ye will lett us year the probatioun of that which ye have affirmed; for yf it be trew, we have bene miserable deceived.'" The pulpit was the great popular educator of the time, and Knox was a great schoolmaster.

In the next place, Knox, to the fullest degree, enjoyed his opportunity to expound the wrath of God, alike against enemies

of the true faith and members of the household of God who failed to do their duty, "O Papistis! whair sall ye hyd yow frome the presence of the Lord? Ye haif pervertit his Law, ye haif takin away his Ordinances, ye haif placit up your awn Statutis instead of his: Wo and dampnatioun abydeth you." But equally to the faithful in London he says, "For gif the messingeris of the Lord that salbe sent to execute his wraith and vengeance sall find you amang ydolateris, your bodeis committing lyke abominationis with thame, ye haif no warrand that ye sall eschape the plagues prepareit for the wickit." The warp and woof of Knox's sermons however is idolatry, by which he means the mass. For instance, "All wirschipping, honoring, or service of God inventit be the braine of man, in the religion of God, without his awn express commandment, is Idolatrie." Hence, not only those who officiated, but those who attended mass were idolaters. Hence those who associate with and countenance adherents of the mass make themselves idolaters and "bound slaves to the Devill". To the logical inquiry, "What then? Sall we go and slay all ydolateris?" Knox skilfully answers, "That wer the office, deir Brethren, of everie Civill Magistrate within his realme. But of yow is requyreit onlie to avoyd participatioun and company of thair abominationis, as well in bodie as in saule." The evil effect of such fierce and vehement utterances upon an already excited congregation can be imagined.

There were not wanting critics of Knox's own party who in private protested against his violence. Thomas Randolph, the English ambassador, wrote to his court, "Our preacher, to be playne with your honour, at one worde, more vehement then descryte or lerned, which I hartily lament. . . . Who, upon Sondays laste, gave the Crosse and the Candle such a wype, that as wyse and lerned as mym selfe wysshed hym to have hylde his peace. He recompenced the same with a marvelous, vehemens, and persinge prayer, in th' ende of his sermond." And Maitland of Lethington said, "You know the vehemence off Knox spiret, which cannot be brydled; and that doth sometymes uter soche sentences as can not easly be dygested by a weake stomach."

Yet to his very last days, when he had to be helped into the pulpit by friends and his voice could only reach a handful of auditors, he continued his preaching, and even on his death-bed sermonized a lady who desired him to praise God for what he had been to Scotland, "Tounge! tounge! ladie; flesche of itself is overproud, and neidis no meanis to esteame the self!" One of his last utterances was "Lord grant trew pastoris to thy Kirke, that puritie of doctrine may be reteaned."

Knox's biographer, Hume Brown, insists that he had a sense of humor, but a search of his works reveals little of that natural apprehension of the incongruous which so marked Luther. Plenty of humor can indeed be found in his works, but it is mostly ill humor. Thus he says of the marriage of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Darnley, that it is a "Marrage of that wicked woman upon the man whom I wish a better lucke". Of two of his enemies, he says in his history, "The Cardinall was knowin proude; and Dumbare, Archbischope of Glasgo, and knowin a glorious foole, and yitt, becaus sometymes he was called the Kingis Maister, he was Chancelour of Scotland." He politely alludes to an Abbey Church as "The Kirk of the Black theivis alias Freiris". Almost the only humorous story in Knox's works is at his own expense. When he threatened to preach at St. Andrews the bishop sent him a message, "That in case John Knox presented him selff to the preaching place, in his town and principall Church, he should gar him be saluted with a dosane of culveringis, querof the most parte should lyght upoun his nose."

III.

Knox's writings and his sermons were only a means to an end, that end being the building up of a Protestant church and community in Scotland; but in that process there were two very distinct parts. Before a new commonwealth could be created the old one must be destroyed, and it was that process of destruction to which the bent of Knox's mind was naturally directed. From Knox's entry on his reformation work in 1547 to his final return to Edinburgh in 1559, he was an exile and had very little direct influence upon the course of events; from 1559 to 1561 the Reformation was accomplished, with Knox among the leaders; in 1561 Mary, Queen of Scots, came over to her kingdom, and in 1567 was virtually deposed by her people. Here then was both a religious and a political revolution, in which Knox was a great figure. How far did he determine the policy of his countrymen and how far was his policy wise?

When Knox came back to Scotland in 1559 it was with the openly expressed purpose of bringing about what could be nothing less than a revolution, and he was proclaimed as a desperate and dangerous man. In his *Letter to the Commonalty of Scotland* he says, "We offer to jeopard our lives for the salvation of your soules, and by manifest Scriptures to prove that Religion, which amongst you is mentained by fier and sworde, to be vaine, fals,

and diabolical. . . . And last we require, that by your power the tyrannie of those cruel beastes (I mean of Preests and Freers) may be bridleed, till we have uttered our mindes in all matters this day debateable in Religion." Yet it is remarkable that Knox had throughout the eight years of strife almost no public employment (other than his office as one of the two ministers of St. Giles). For a short time he was indeed secretary of Congregation and designated as agent to England, but after less than six months' service as secretary he withdrew, professing to rejoice "that God hath delivered me from the most part of these civill effares, for now are men of better judgment and greater experience occupied in these matters". Nevertheless, he was a member of various important bodies and commissions, which drew up the *Confession of Faith*, the *Book of Discipline* and other state papers; and he was also commissioned to write that account of the Congregation which ultimately expanded into his history of the Reformation; but his service was always that of counsellor and agitator, and not of executor.

The son of a university, a priest in orders, one would expect Knox to be saturated with a sense of the beauty of the churches and abbeys, and the refining influence of the glorious Scottish architecture upon the people; nevertheless, he forthwith unchained a wild beast which he had neither power nor will to curb. It was not an accident that his sermon of May, 1559, in Perth was almost immediately followed by the gutting of the church by a mob. A few days later, Knox records, "the Abbay of Lindores, a place of blacke monkes, was reformed, their altars overthrowne, their idols, vestments of idolatrie, and masse bookes, were burnt in their owne presence, and they commaunded to cast away their monkish [habits]." Though he occasionally alludes to efforts to prevent the absolute destruction of the churches, he gives it as his opinion that the "best way to keep the rooks from returning was to pull down their nests".

Toward the old clergy, Knox's attitude was always that of the bitterest and most uncompromising hostility. In the *Supplication* of 1560 he says, "Thair is not ane lauchfull minster, gif Godis word, the practise of the Apostillis, and thair awin ancient Dawis, sall judge of lauchfull electioun. We farther offer oure selfis to prove thame all thevis and murtheris, yea, rebellis and tratouris to the lauchfull autoritie of Empriouris, Kyngis, and Prencis; and thairfor unworthy to be sufferrit in any Reformeit Commonwealth." Knox's rigid aversion to toleration found voice in the *Book of*

Discipline of 1560, which plainly declares: "That all doctrine repugnyng to the same be utterlie suppressed as damnabill to mannish salvatioun", and "That the obstinat mayntenaris and teachearis of suche abhominacionis aucht not to eschaip the punyschement of the Civile Magistrat". And he faces the ultimate logic of his argument against "alsweill the manifest dispysar as the prophanare of the sacramentis. . . . We dare not prescribe unto you what penalties shalbe required of suche: But this we fear not to affirm, that the ane and the other deserve death."

With such general views on the character and faith of the Catholics were conjoined very strict notions as to the obligation of the rulers—that is, of the Queen Regent and of her daughter, Queen Mary—to establish Protestantism. Thus in his *Letter to the Commonalty of Scotland*, Knox says, "Althoghe ye be but subiectes, ye may lawfully require of your superiours, be it of your King, be it of your Lordes, rulers and powers, that they provide for you true Preachers. . . . And if in this point your superiours be negligent, or yet pretend to maintaine tyrantes in their tyrannie, most justly ye may provide true teachers for yourselves."

From the theory of obligation on the rulers it was a short step to the right of the subjects to compel the sovereign to act within the constitution. As far back as 1554 Knox put some significant queries to Bullinger on the governmental rights of an infant prince, of a woman, of an "idolatrour Sovereign", of "a Magistrate who enforces Idolatory and Condemns true religion". And in his letter to the Queen Regent of 1558, he says, "That all is not reputed before God sedition and conjuration which the foolish multitude so estemeth, nether yet is everie tumult and breach of public order contrarie to Goddes commandement".

From such premises it was an easy and speedy road to the doctrine that idolatrous princes might be deposed, and Knox urged with all his might the removal of the Queen Regent and still more of Mary, Queen of Scots. For such desired ends the preacher was not altogether unwilling to use bad means. In 1559 he asked Cecil to send a thousand men to fight the French, notwithstanding the peaceful relations between France and England. "For it is free for your subjects to serve in warr ane prence or nation for thare wages. And yf ye fear that such excesses shall not prevaile, you may declayr thame rebellis to your Realme when ye shalbe assured that thei be in our companye." Even less allowable means were not beyond Knox's conscience. Upon the

assassination of Cardinal Beaton in 1546, his comment is: "We wold, that the Reader should observe Goddis just judgementis, and how that he can deprehend the worldly wyse in thare awin wisdom." And on the killing of Rizzio, Knox said, "And let the world understand in plane termes what we meane, the great abusar of this commoun wealth, that pultron and vyle knave Davie, was justlie punished."

It was not in the nature of Knox to understand that "they that take the sword shall perish by the sword", that murder and brute force may destroy, but cannot build up; still less was it in his nature to understand or to harmonize with Mary, Queen of Scots. The most dramatic episode in Knox's life, and the turning point in Mary's was a series of five conferences between August 26, 1561, and May, 1563. Since our knowledge of these interviews is almost wholly derived from Knox's own record in his own history, one naturally feels interested to know "how the lion would have painted it"; unwritten circumstances, tones and gestures do much to alter even an accurate report of a personal interview. Nevertheless there seems little reason to doubt that what Knox set down as his language and Mary's was substantially the language used. Contrary to the general impression, a reading of this record reveals a John Knox at first moved by a strong traditional sense of personal loyalty and by the graces of the most fascinating woman of her time; and he was genuinely anxious to find some common ground if possible. Indeed Knox later owns that "so cairfull was I of that common tranquillitie, and so loth was I to have offended those of whom I conceived a good opinioun, that in secreat conference with earnest and zealous men, I traveled rather to mitigat, yea, to slokin, that fervencye that God had kyndled in otheris, than to animat or encourage thame to put thair hands to the Lordis work; Whairintill I unfeanedlie acknowledge my selff to have done most wickedlie."

Hardly had Mary landed in Scotland in 1561 to take possession of her kingdom when mass was celebrated at Holyrood Chapel; for his sermon against it the queen straightway summoned Knox to court. Notwithstanding the studied courtesy of Knox's behavior, he squarely laid down in this first interview the principle which he ever after insisted upon with regard to the authority of a Catholic sovereign, "Think ye, (quod sche) that subjectis having power may resist thair Princes?" "Yf thair Princes exceed thair boundis, (quod he), Madam, and do against that whairfoir they should be obeyed, it is no doubt but thei may be resisted, evin by power."

The second interview, a year and a half later, came about because Knox very offensively preached against the queen's dancing; she called for him and charged him with "travailling to bring hir in haitterent and contempt of the people, and that he had exceded the boundis of his text". In courtesy and in argument, the queen had the best of it, and she even took him on his own ground by asking him why he did not come privately to admonish her of anything that he thought amiss. Knox revealed his essential lack of breeding by saying, "For albeit at your Grace's commaundment I am here now, yitt can not I tell what other men shall judge of me, that at this tyme of day am absent from my book and wayting upoun the Courte." To which the queen replied with just resentment, "You will not alwaies be at your book", and so turned her back.

Four months later came a third interview, in which Mary attempted to persuade Knox to prevent the arrest and punishment of certain priests for celebrating mass. She spoke him fair, she even sent for him next day, treated him with confidence and promised to give up her point, but Knox's heart was all the more hardened; as Randolph reported to the English court, "He is so full of mistrust in all her doynges, wordes, and sayengs, as thoughe he wer eyther of God's privie conell, that knowe howe he had determined of her from the begninge, or that he knewe the secretes of her harte so well, that nether she dyd or culde have for ever one good thought of God or of his trewe religion"; and Maitland of Lethington said, "I wolde wishe he shoulde deale with her more gently, being a young Princess onpersuaded."

In his capacity as censor of the kingdom Knox now proceeded to lay down the law as to the queen's marriage. It was of the first importance to Protestant Scotland that Mary should not ally herself with any Catholic sovereign, yet when Knox threatened, "Goddis vengeance upoun the countrey" if she should marry, "ane infidell (and all Papists are infidellis)", she sent for him in an agitation of spirit which led her to what Knox very ungallantly called "owling, besydes womanlie weaping". The masculine mind cannot forbear a tribute of admiration for the one man in history who was unmoved by the tears of a beautiful young queen; yet who can help feeling some sympathy with the queen in her demand, "What have ye to do with my marriage? Or what ar ye within this Commonwealth?" "A subject borne within the same, Madam," was Knox's reply, "And albeit I neather be Erle, Lord,

nor Barroun within it, yitt hes God maid me, (how abject that ever I be in your eyes,) a profitable member within the same."

When, three years later, Mary fell into depths of degradation and misery, the fierceness of Knox's hatred blazed up afresh. The English ambassador reported that, "He dothe continewe hys seveare exhortations as well against the Quene as agaynst Bodwell; thretynge the grete plage of God to thys wholle countrey and nayton yf she be spared from her condigne ponyshement." Still later when Mary was a prisoner and a fugitive in England, in his prayer on the assassination of the regent, Earl of Murray, Knox complimented the Almighty that, "Thou didst appoynt a Regent endued with such graces as the Divell himself cannot accuse or justly convict him, this only excepted that foolish pity did so farre prevaill in him, concerning execution and punishment which thou commanded to have been executed upon her, and upon her complices, the murth-ers of her husband."

It was impossible for Mary, Queen of Scots, and John Knox to agree, for her purpose was to restore the Catholic Church, and Knox's was completely and forever to destroy it; yet what sovereign of an ancient and stately house could brook the personal public criticism which Knox saw fit to use? But it was a losing battle for her: the Queen of Scotland had to learn the bitter meaning of the proverb: "If the rock fall on the pitcher, woe to the pitcher! and if the pitcher fall on the rock, woe to the pitcher!"

IV.

All three of the other great leaders of the Reformation, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin set themselves with greater or less success to the building up of a new political and ecclesiastical order on the ruins of the old, and Calvin laid down principles on the relations of church and state which still powerfully affect the Protestant Christian world. At the beginning of his career Knox also seemed destined to become a great political leader; his friends said that "Jhonne Knox had foirwairned us, by his letteris from Geneva, of all dangeris that he foirsaw [to] ensew on our enterpryse." At that time he was eager to go to England, and came near resuming his residence in a kingdom where he would have found a very different kind of queen in the valiant Elizabeth.

Fortunately for Scotland Elizabeth would none of him, but he remained a strong partizan of alliance between the Scottish Protestants and England; was the medium of letters to Cecil in behalf of the Lords of the Congregation, and actually crossed the

border as an accredited envoy ; but the warden of the East Marshes, under a superior influence which may easily be divined, wrote dryly, "I think it not expedient, that in such raritie of preachearis, ye two be ony long tyme absent from the Lordis." Except for one transient visit in 1567 Knox never again set foot in England, but he remained in correspondence with some of the English statesmen and appears to have had regular political intelligence from France, Flanders and other parts of Europe ; he even had some secret correspondence with a representative of Catherine de' Medici. After 1561 however he had little influence and no authority in foreign relations, although it is evident that he desired to be consulted and to be employed in such matters.

Familiar as Knox was with principalities and powers throughout history he had no interest in, and little knowledge of, government as a function of the man of the world. Zwingli was distinctly a democrat and Luther a champion of the vested rights of princes ; Knox was neither. In the two passages upon human rights which have come to the writer's attention, he says, "For albeit God hath put and ordered distinction and differences betwixt the King and subjects, betwixt the rulers and the commune people, in the regiment and administration of Civile policies, yet in the hope of the life to come he hath made all equal." The simple truth is that Knox had no theory of government, other than the tradition of royal power, except the principle, absolutely necessary for his purposes, that an "idolatrous", that is a Catholic, sovereign who insisted on the right to attend mass could be deposed.

As has already been seen, Knox had no favorable opinion of most of the sovereigns of his time. We have already seen what was his opinion of the Queen Regent and Queen Mary and how plainly he set forth the right of deposing a sovereign who did not reign according to the will of God. Mary's son, James, was not far from right when he said of Knox, "Hee himselfe and his adherentes were brought in, and well settled, and by these means made strong enough to undertake the matters of Reformation themselves. Then, loe they beganne to make smal account of her Supremacy, nor would longer rest upon her authority, but tooke the cause into their owne hand." Knox's whole teaching was that "Na power on earth is above the power of the Civill reular ; that everie saule, be he Pope or Cardinall, aught to be subject to the higher Poweris. That thair commandementis, not repugnyng to Godis glorie and honour, ought to be obeyit, evin with great loss of temporall thingis." This is plainly the doctrine of the subordina-

tion of the church to the civil power, but Knox's system of government was the purest theocracy; above the civil power was the law of God: "Of conscience I am compelled to say, that neyther the consent of people, proces of time, nor multitude of men, can establish a law which God shall approve." The only remaining detail in this beautifully simple theory of government was who should decide what was the law of God; and upon that point Knox never hesitated: in his own mind he was himself the ultimate tribunal.

A whimsical part of Knox's political theory and not in the least necessary for his ultimate purposes was his habitual disapproval of women. "Nature, I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe; and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruell, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment." And in his *First Blast* he rings all the changes on the weakness of female princes. "And such be al women, compared unto man in bearing of authoritie. For their sight in civile regiment is but blindness; their strength, weakness; their counsel, foolishnes; and judgment, phrensie, if it be rightly considered. This sentence, I say, did God pronounce against Heva and her daughter as the rest of the scriptures doth evidentlie witness. So that no woman can ever presume to reigne above man, but the same she must needes do in despite of God." And he reaches his climax with this pronouncement: "That rotten wall, the usurped and unjust empire of Women, shall fall by itself in despit of all man,—to the destruction of so manie as shall labor to uphold it. And therefore let all man be advertised, for THE TRUMPET HATH ONES BLOWN."

In view of the carefully wrought governmental system of Calvin, it is striking how little attention Knox paid to the civil administration of his own country: he simply accepted as final that combination of weak or desperate rulers with the nobility who were the ruling force in Parliament; and the vague authority of the Assembly, in which the ministers had great weight. Much has been made of the *Book of Discipline*, in which Knox had an important part, as containing principles of government, but they are not to be found there; except for certain offenses, such as drunkenness and other excess in which Knox held that the church should be allowed a penalty, he simply ascribed indefinite power to the magistrates. In his letter to the regent of 1555 he says: "Ye thinke, peradventure, that the care of religion is not committed to Magistrates, but to the Bishoppes and Estate Ecclesiastical, as they terme

it; No, no, the negligence of Bishoppes shall no lesse be requyred of the handes of Magistrates because they foster and maintein them in tyranny than shall the oppression of fals judges, which kynges maintein and defend." He abjures all authority of ecclesiastics to take life for heresy and affirms, "Of the premisses it is evident, that to lawfull powers is geven the sworde for punyshment of malefactors; for maintenance of innocents, and for the profit and utilitie of theyr subjects." He even by a self-denying ordinance says, "Let none that be appointed to labour in Christes vineyard be entangled with Civil affaires." In fact, the only question of church authority upon which he seemed strongly to feel was the transfer of the church estates, which he thought ought all to go to the Protestant clergy; and he characteristically expressed his disappointment when the nobles got two-thirds, while of the other third half went to the queen and only half to the ministers. "I see Twa partis freely gevin to the Devill, and the Thrid maun be devided betwix God and the Devill. Weill, bear witnes to me, that this day I say it, or it be long the Devill shall have Three partis of the Thrid."

A large and intelligent interest in education has been ascribed to John Knox because of the articles in the *Book of Discipline* on education. Though he had himself been a teacher and though he probably did sketch the broad scheme of universal national education, the system was not put into operation. He strongly favored the free education of ministers' children in learning "gif thai be found apt therero; and failing thair of that thai be put to some handycraft, or exercised in some verteuouse industrie"—perhaps a distant suggestion of industrial training. The school subjects were to be reading, the catechism, the grammar and the Latin tongue. The rich must be compelled to send their children to school, the poor must be aided, and at twenty-four years "The learner most be removed to serve the Church on Commoun-wealth, unless he be fund a neccessarie Reidare in the same Colledge or Universitie." Knox recognizes two other professions besides the ministry, that of the civil servant and of the college teacher. His scheme of education comprised schools, colleges and, "Last, the great Schollis callit Universiteis shalbe repleanischit with those that be apt to learnyng." Throughout the system he recognizes religious instruction as an essential part of the necessary study; and he enforces his plea for schools with a splendid sentence which sounds like the lofty precepts of the fathers of the New England commonwealths, "Not doubting but yf God sall grant quietnes, and gif your

Wisdomes grace to set forward letteris in the sord prescribed, ye shall leave wisdome and learnying to your posteretie, ane treasure more to be estemed nor ony earthlie treasure ye ar abill to provide for thame; whiche, without wisdome, ar more abill to be thair ruyn and confisioun, than help or comfort."

V.

What shall be our final estimate of John Knox in his public capacity and in his relations to his fellow-men? What is the secret of the pre-eminence of this untitled potentate; this magistrate without the robe of office, this voice so arrogant, so disdainful, yet so persuasive? The solution of this extraordinary character is to be found in two things, of which the first is his own conception of his mission as a prophet. In the *Appellation* of 1556 he says, "My wordes are sharpe, but consider, my Lords, that they are not mine, but that they are the threatynge of the Omnipotent, who assuredly will performe the voices of the Prophetes." To the proud abbot of Crossraguell he said: "The order of God hath bene in suche publick corruptions, to raise up simple and obscure men, in the beginning of there vocation, unknowen to the worlds, to rebuke the manifest defection of the people from God." And in his fateful sermon against Darnley he said: "For in the publike place I consulte not with flesh and bloud what I shall propone to the people, but as the Spirit of my God who hath sent me, and unto whome I must answers, moveth me, so I speake." This clear conception of a divine mission, this absolute assurance that "God hath revealed unto me secretes unknowne to the worlde; and also that he made my tong a trumpet, to forwarne realmes and nations", accounts for the fierceness, the vindictiveness and the excess of Knox's teachings and influence. A prophet is not sent into the world to attend parish meetings, or to execute the laws against wrongous imprisonment. Knox is like Savonarola, like Ulrich von Hutten, like Whitfield, men sent to arouse the world, leaving to others the task of organizing it.

Then how could such a man maintain himself? The key to his public life of thirteen years in the midst of bitter foes and irritated friends, can only be inferred, and yet the inference is irresistible; Knox's support and his power really came from his position as the spokesman and favorite of the Edinburgh burghers, who were far more powerful even than court or prelates or nobles. The parishioners of St. Giles doubtless were proud of having the fiercest minister in Scotland. John Knox could defy princes,

alienate the Congregation and offend the Assembly, for the same reason that Robespierre could so long hold his own in a hostile convention. The champion of the Edinburgh citizens never knew how to use his great oratorical powers for the uplifting of the commonwealth, or for the development of long policies. He was no man of the world in the sense that he could lay hold of the experiences and combine the service of others. He gave little aid to the political distress of Scotland for he had no plan of relief and apparently no sense of the problem. He had the arrogance as well as the eloquence of the orator; he loved to exalt his own services and his own wisdom. Yet Knox never seems to have used his power for his own personal advantage. He loved his country and according to his lights served her well, and he himself sums up his aims and his successes in a prayer which was the last publication of his life.

“For being drowned in ignorance, thow hes gevin to me knowl-
edge above the common sort of my brethren; my tounge hes thow
usit to set forth thy glorie, to oppung idolatire, errouris, and fals
doctrine. Thow hes compelled me to foirspeak, as well delyver-
aunce to the afflicted, as destruction to certane inobedient; the
performance whereof, not I alone, bot the verray blind world has
alreddy sene.”

His was the spirit of Ibsen's Brand:

“How long the war will last?
As long as life, till ye have cast
All ye possess before the Lord,
And slain the Spirit of Accord;
Until your stiff will bend and bow,
And every coward scruple fall,
Before the bidding,—Nought or all.”

ALBERT BUSHNELL HART.